

**World No Tobacco Day National Programme**

**Date: 17 June 2021; Time: 11:00 am**

**Respected Chair,**

**Mr Lokman Hossain Miah**, Secretary of Health Services Division

**Honourable Chief Guest,**

**His Excellency Mr Zahid Maleque**, Hon'ble Minister of Health & Family Welfare

**Honourable Special Guests,**

**Mr. Muhammad Ali Noor**, Secretary of Medical Education

**National Professor Brigadier General Dr. Abdul Malik**

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen present here and joining online from all over Bangladesh,

A very good morning to you all.

Every year, the world observes the World No Tobacco Day, advocating for effective policies to reduce the demand and the supply of tobacco, as well as for raising awareness on detrimental effects of tobacco on health, society and economy. This year, on the World No Tobacco Day, a call is being made to tobacco users all over the world to '**Commit to quit**'. The campaign will support at least 100 million people as they try to give up tobacco.

I congratulate the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare for coming up with a very attractive translation of this year's World No Tobacco Day theme as

***Asun Amra Pro-ti-gga Kori  
Jibon Ba-cha-tey Tamak Cha-ri***

The detrimental health effects of tobacco use are well known. Current Covid-19 pandemic has further complicated the issue as available research suggests that smokers are at higher risk of developing severe COVID-19 outcomes and death. As a result, COVID-19 pandemic has led to millions of tobacco users desiring to quit as well.

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey conducted in Bangladesh reported that 66% of current smokers and 51% of current smokeless tobacco users were planning to quit tobacco. This is a very promising number and an opportunity to prevent harmful effects of tobacco in this population group.

But quitting tobacco is not easy, and a tobacco user often needs professional help to quit and in addition tobacco cessation service is yet to be made available at scale in Bangladesh.

I thank the Non-communicable Disease Control Programme of the Directorate General of Health Services for incorporating 'Brief Tobacco Intervention' in the '**Package for Essential Noncommunicable Disease Intervention**' training package for primary health care providers. A few organizations have initiated cessation service with limited capacity which needs to be increased manifold considering the huge demand.

**Excellency, distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,**

I take this opportunity to make a few propositions for your consideration.

**First of all**, there is need to scale up the training for primary health care providers on brief tobacco intervention. It is proved that brief tobacco intervention is a cost-effective cessation tool.

**Second**, to establish a toll-free quit line. One option for this may be under the umbrella of available telemedicine service being offered through 'Sayastho Batayon'.

**Third**, to introduce 'mobile phone application' based cessation service, popularly known as m-cessation.

And, **fourth**, to introduce Nicotine Replacement Therapy in Bangladesh. NRT is included in the WHO list of essential drugs and many tobacco users need NRT to successfully quit tobacco use.

I am pleased to know that the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have initiated the process of amending the current tobacco control law to make it better compliant with the **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control**, and developing a roadmap to make Bangladesh tobacco-free by the year 2040 as envisioned by the Honorable Prime Minister.

Members of Parliament can play an important role in the legislative agenda to make this vision a reality. It is also encouraging to see that awareness campaigns are being undertaken and enforcement of the tobacco control law is being strengthened using funding from the Government, which is commendable from the perspective of sustainability of the programme.

Tobacco products are still very affordable in Bangladesh considering the low price and increasing purchasing power of the citizens. I am optimistic that this will be taken care of, by adopting an appropriate price and tax policy based on international best practices.

**Excellency, distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,**

For the second consecutive year, we are observing the World No Tobacco Day at a time while the world is struggling to fight COVID-19. Smoking impairs lung function making it harder for the body to fight off coronaviruses. Tobacco is also a major risk factor for noncommunicable diseases like cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases and diabetes which put people with these conditions at higher risk for developing severe illness when affected by COVID-19. **Therefore, it is important more than ever, to adopt and implement evidence-based policies to reduce the consumption for tobacco. And I assure the continued support from WHO in this regard.**

Before I end, I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate **Professor Sohel Reza Choudhury** for receiving **WHO South-East Asia Regional Director's Special Recognition Award 2021** in recognition of his commendable contribution to **tobacco control work in Bangladesh.**

Thank you.